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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4360
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MOSCOW 004083

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON KHODORKOVSKIY ATTACK

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovskiy suffered a deep cut to the face in an April 14 attack in a prison barrack, one of his lawyers and director of his press center confirmed to us. Our interlocutors told us his team would not seek to press charges against the attacker because Khodorkovskiy would not consent to such a move. They also noted unconfirmed reports that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had begun communicating with the GOR on Khodorkovskiy's March 21 appeal to that body. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On April 14 a fellow inmate reportedly attacked former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovskiy with a improvised knife. Yuriy Schmidt, one of former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovskiy's lead lawyers, confirmed to us on April 17 that Khodorkovskiy had suffered a deep cut to the face that required stitching following an attack by a cellmate with an improvised knife. In a separate conversation, Maria Ordzhonikidze, director of the press center for Khodorkovskiy's legal team, added that the attack took place at three in the morning while Khodorkovskiy slept in a prison barrack shared with approximately 60 to 80 prisoners. Prison authorities later found two other knives in the possession of the attacker, who, according to Ordzhonikidze, confessed that he had wanted to poke out one of Khodorkovskiy's eyes. Both Schmidt and Ordzhonikidze told us that the motivation for the attack was unclear, and they would be seeking more details. Schmidt criticized the authorities for trying to downplay the incident, and said he would hold a press conference on Thursday with further details.

13. (SBU) Both our sources confirmed that the attacker was unlikely to face charges over the incident. Schmidt said that he would not move to press charges without Khodorkovskiy's consent. Khodorkovskiy would not grant consent, Schmidt said, both out of fear of reprisal from other prisoners and prison authorities and because of his personal pride. Ordzhonikidze said the authorities should have pressed charges regardless of Khodorkovskiy's consent, and noted reports that the government would investigate why prison authorities were not planning to do so.

14. (SBU) Ordzhonikidze also noted unconfirmed reports that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had begun communicating with the GOR on Khodorkovskiy's March 21 appeal to that body. She noted that other appeals, including those regarding Khodorkovskiy's treatment in prison, were ongoing.

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